1;Seligmann & Seligmann 2-3 (1907-1908) 1911
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PREFACE

THE Veddas have been regarded as one of the most primitive of existing races, and it has long been felt desirable that their social life and religious ideas should be investigated as thoroughly as possible. The welcome opportunity of conducting this research was afforded me on the initiative of Dr A.C. Haddon, who suggested to the Honourable Mr John Ferguson and Dr Arthur Willey that it was desirable that the Ceylon Government should continue its enlightened policy of studying the anthropology, archaeology and history of Ceylon and its peoples. This proposal received the warmest support of the Governor, Sir Henry Blake, G.C.M.G., and his successor the present Governor, His Excellency Sir Henry E. McCallum, G.C.M.G., A.D.C., of the Colonial Secretary and of the other members of the Legislative Council who made a liberal grant covering the expenses of the expedition in the field.

Not only was the work urgently needed on account of its scientific importance, but it was known that the Veddas were a numerically small people verging on extinction, and so affected by contact with Tamils and Sinhalese that if they were not studied promptly there was every possibility that it would soon be too late to study them at all; indeed, with all my efforts I was able to meet only four families, and hear of two more, who I believe had never practised cultivation. Pure-blooded Veddas are not quite so rare as this statement implies. The Danigala community, the best known "wild" Veddas of Ceylon, are still reasonably pure-blooded, though they have adopted many Sinhalese habits, including cultivation, and have assumed the rôle of professional primitive man. They are commonly fetched to be interviewed by travellers at the nearest rest house, where they appear clad only in the traditional scanty Vedda garment, whereas, when not on show, they dress very much as the neighbouring peasant Sinhalese.

2:Bailey G-5 (ca. 1854) 1863
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for leisure enables me to follow the suggestion of a friend, and to endeavour to arrange the materials which I collected with so much care and labour.

At a time when the investigation of the origin of uncivilised races is attracting so much attention in England, I trust that the results of my inquiries and observations may not be considered devoid of interest; and, in this hope, I venture to present them, such as they are, to the Ethnological Society.

The following sketch of the Veddahs is the result of personal and often-repeated investigation among the people themselves: it is founded only on direct evidence; I have admitted nothing on hearsay. Indeed, so difficult is it to elicit anything from people in such a state of barbarism, that I have accepted even the most direct testimony with caution and have only adopted it after careful cross-examination had satisfied me of its trustworthiness. I have tested again and again the truth of every statement I have made, sometimes reluctantly abandoning a link here and there which would have made my case more complete, only from a *doubt* of the perfect accuracy of my information.*

The facts I state are, so far as I can judge, beyond dispute, if honest and patient inquiry be of any value. The deductions I draw from them are my own, and must go for what they are worth.

I limit my observations to the wildest tribes, for it is amongst

* It may be said that it is a work of mere supererogation, if not presumption, on my part, to attempt to describe the Veddahs, seeing that Sir J. E. Tennent has so recently devoted several chapters of his work on Ceylon to this subject. But, interesting as these chapters are—perhaps the most interesting in the book—they contain little else than a comparison of the habits of the people of the island, as observed by the ancient voyagers in the fourth and fifth centuries, with the traditional but now long-exploded customs of the Veddahs as reported by Knox. The accomplished author throws no new light on the wild tribes of the Veddahs as they are. On the contrary, his account of them is in some important particulars defective, and even inaccurate. He glances casually at those tribes which are in the wildest state, touching with precision none of their peculiarities, and dwells in detail upon those only which, from long association with the Singalese and Tamil races, have lost much of their originality. Of the ancient aborigines he has compiled much that is curious. Of the existing Veddahs he has given us little besides an epitome of former notices.

An account of the aboriginal races of Ceylon, published under the authority of a late colonial secretary of the island, would naturally be accepted and quoted as accurate and authentic. Sir J. E. Tennent's chapters on the Veddahs, therefore, render it more incumbent on me to lay before the Society the results of my own inquiries. For, though the habits and customs of wild tribes are important aids in determining their origin, a description of them is worse than useless, unless it be made by a person competent of his own knowledge to describe them. I pretend to no competency beyond this.

3:Naish G-5 (1925) 1930 AX5 Vedda AX5

bours' language, customs, and manner of life. In a few of the remoter forest fastnesses of the interior there are still to be found more or less pure-blooded Veddas who continue to support life by the precarious *chena* cultivation and by hunting: but in addition to these pure-blooded Veddas, who are a very feeble folk indeed in point of numbers, the inhabitants of many of what are generally recognized as Sinhalese villages, and the so-called "coast Veddas," who have their settlements in a few places along the eastern coast to the north of Batticaloa, are to a greater or less extent of Vedda origin. The Veddas as a race have been visited and described by C. G. and B. Z. Seligmann [1] and more recently by Dr. R. L. Spittel [2] of Colombo. Of the coast Veddas the Seligmanns say,—"although these coast Veddas, or Verdas as they call themselves, have intermarried with the Tamils and have adopted many Tamil customs, they still have remains of the old clan system of the Veddas, and although they usually speak Tamil, the majority of them say they have a language of their own which they consider to be the old Vedda language, and which was found to be Sinhalese. They have roughly-built temples, and we were told independently in two settlements that the chief agency worshipped was called Kapalpe or Kabalpe, *i.e.*, "ship spirit." At first we feared some misunderstanding, but when one of us was shown within one of their temples, into which after some trouble he was allowed to penetrate, a small model of a ship partly square rigged was seen, and it was stated that at a special ceremony this was hoisted to the top of a pole some thirty feet tall which stood outside the temple." [3] The ceremony to be described in what follows appears to be in fact that conducted for the propitiation of this "ship spirit" and of the goddess Ammal, and, if so, it is that which the Seligmanns saw rehearsed, in part at any rate, at Vakarai.[4] The description, therefore, imperfect and perhaps inaccurate in some details as it may be, being

[1] C. G. and B. Z. Seligmann, *The Veddas*. See also *Spolia Zeylanica*, vol. v, Part xx, Dec. 1908, pp. 155 *et seq.*

[2] R. L. Spittel, *Wild Ceylon*.

[3] C. G. and B. Z. Seligmann, *Spolia Zeylanica*, vol. v, Part xx, Dec. 1908, pp. 156, 157.

[4] *The Veddas*, pp. 333-9.

3:Naish G-5 (1925) 1930 AX5 Vedda AX5

written from memory aided by not very adequate notes made shortly after the ceremony, helps to fill up a lacuna in the hitherto published records of Vedda customs and ritual. 121 796

In June of 1925 I was engaged, as a junior administrative officer, in dealing with an outbreak of cholera among the Muslim tobacco cultivators in the neighbourhood of a remote coast Vedda village, about forty-four miles north of Batticaloa on the Batticaloa-Trincomalee coast road. Investigation by the medical officer with whom I was associated soon revealed the fact that the focus of the infection was a yet more remote inland district lying behind that part of the coast, and that to grapple effectively with the disease it would be necessary to evacuate the population of that area and to concentrate it, for the treatment of the actually sick and for the segregation of the "contacts," in the comparatively accessible locality where we had already established ourselves, not far from the spot where the first cases to be brought to our notice had occurred. I therefore found myself obliged, at short notice, to enlarge the camp of which I had already begun the construction, and in particular to begin the building of a new hospital hut on a more grandiose scale than that originally contemplated. For the work of construction, which consisted of the erection of a framework of jungle sticks and the covering of it with *cadjans*,—dried and plaited palm branches,—according to the familiar village method, it was necessary to enlist the services of the coast Veddas of the adjoining settlement. The villagers were naturally reluctant to engage in work which they not unreasonably supposed would expose them to the infection, and it called for much tact and persuasiveness on the part of the Chief Headman of the *pattu* to get them to do so. Fully realizing that, apart from all other considerations, the occurrence of even one case of cholera among them would effectively put a stop to all co-operation, the Chief Headman and I took, successfully as the event showed, every possible precaution to prevent such a catastrophe. Everything seemed to be going on without let or hindrance when the Chief Headman upset my calculations by announcing that the work must cease for twelve hours on the 8th of June, to enable the villagers to perform a ceremony in honour of the *Periya Devi* 123 [131 361] [796 776]

5: Spittel D-5 (ca. 1920) 1945 . AX5 Vedda AX5

PREFACE TO THE FIRST EDITION

THERE is little of hunting in these pages, much of the forest-folk and their ways. I have purposely refrained, except in one section, from introducing incidents of sport—of which, truth to tell, I have had small share—into a narrative primarily designed to describe the more human and homely aspects of jungle life, especially where as it concerns the Veddas—the last remnant of Ceylon's aboriginal race.

Regarding the origin of the Veddas, I incline to the view that they are an off-shoot of one of the wild, autochthonous tribes of India, who crossed over to Ceylon, in prehistoric times, when the two lands were one, and subsequently got cut off by the inroad of the sea. They appear to be very akin to the Gonds of India. Indeed, the description of a present day Gond might just as well apply to the Vedda:—"A man of small sturdy build, with piercing eyes and a free athletic carriage..... axe hitched on shoulder, bow and arrows in hand".*

I must acknowledge help I have received from many friends. Apart from those to whom reference is made in foot-notes in the text I am indebted to Mr. F. Lewis for much valuable advice in the planning of some of our journeys; to him and Mr. C. Drieberg I owe the botanical names of trees. Three of the trips described here were made in the company of Mr. Leigh Smith, to whom, I take this opportunity, of expressing my gratitude for much valuable help in the preparation of my manuscript for the press.

The pen and ink illustrations are by Mr. E. F. Van Dort.

Colombo

R. L. SPITTEL

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* "Rifle and Romance in the Indian Jungle", by A. I. R. Glasfurd